

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore 9922 Front St. (Hwy M-72) Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

L30(SLBE)

November 16, 2007

Dear Friends and Partners:

The National Park Service (NPS) is continuing the process of preparing detailed action plans for restoring non-historic lands throughout Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (Lakeshore) that have been disturbed from their natural state by past use. To make certain that the impacts of restoring these lands are thoroughly evaluated, a Disturbed Lands Restoration Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared. The purpose of the EA is to ensure:

- A) That the action plans include options that utilize the best science available for restoring disturbed lands while protecting the associated natural environment;
- B) That the public has the opportunity for well-informed input on the range of options available for the disturbed areas; and,
- C) That considerations for rare or protected plants and animals, critical habitat and dunes, wetlands, cultural resources, and visitor use and safety are key components within each plan.

The disturbed lands will be separated into three principal management areas including:

- 1) Non-native weed infestations and threats. There is a need to aggressively manage specific invasive weed species that pose critical, expanding threats to the natural environs of the Lakeshore. These include plants such as garlic mustard, baby's breath, purple loosestrife, Phragmites, and black locust. Possible manual, cultural, mechanical, chemical, prescribed fire, and biological control options have been researched for each invasive plant.
- 2) Formerly developed sites and sites disturbed by heavy public use. The developed/disturbed sites include former residences, former business sites, abandoned power lines, former driveways, gravel pits, refuse dumps, non-historic former agricultural fields, and impacted areas adjacent to popular attractions such as beaches and campsites.
- 3) Conifer plantations and windbreaks. Over 750 acres of conifers within the Lakeshore were planted 30 to 45 years ago. Many are tree species that are not native to North America and are now spreading out into surrounding native habitats. All are densely planted trees that may serve as prime sites for conifer insect and disease infestations leading to future native conifer die-offs. The lack of biological diversity at these sites is striking, and the plantations prevent natural succession into native mixed hardwood forest. The heavy fuel loads may serve as volatile ignition points for wildfires during drier periods. This threat to surrounding communities, private homes, and natural habitats is of major concern.

The Disturbed Lands Restoration EA process is just beginning. We welcome your ideas and insight to help identify what impacts and issues to consider as we continue this comprehensive restoration effort. Please provide your comments to us by **December 31, 2007**. The comments you submit during this "scoping" phase of planning will be incorporated into a range of alternatives and impact analyses in the EA. The EA will then be made available for further public review and comment in 2008 as we again solicit your input. Comments may be mailed to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 9922 Front Street, Empire, Michigan 49630 or electronically through a link on the park's website (www.nps.gov/slbe).

Sincerely,

Dusty Shultz

Superintendent